

Truth in a Lie:

Forty Years After the 18½ Minute Gap

By James D. Robenalt

On the afternoon of October 1, 1973, President Richard M. Nixon and his chief of staff, [Alexander M. Haig, Jr.](#), slipped away from the White House and went for a rambling, nearly two-hour car ride through the Washington countryside.

Nixon and Haig left the White House because they did not want to risk anyone overhearing them talk about a sensitive matter. Or perhaps they feared that someone might use remnants of the White House recording system, though it was supposedly disconnected, to capture their words. Given all the [leaks to the press](#), and the exposure of just about every administration secret up to and including the existence of the White House tapes, paranoia wasn't entirely unjustified.

Just prior to this unscheduled outing, Nixon's long-time personal secretary, [Rose Mary Woods](#), had come to the president in a panic. She breathlessly told him she had accidentally caused a four to five minute buzz on a subpoenaed tape she had been transcribing. And the recording appeared to be a crucial one: it encompassed meetings on June 20, 1972 between the president and his top aides, [H. R. "Bob" Haldeman](#) and [John D. Ehrlichman](#), on what was Nixon's first day back in the White House since the Watergate break-in, which had occurred three days earlier.

Nixon told Woods not to worry, as he didn't think the specific portion of the tape she accidentally altered had been subpoenaed. Still, he immediately called Haig, according to Nixon's memoir *RN*, and told him what happened. The two men then left the White House for their impromptu car ride.[\[1\]](#)

Two months after Woods's private admission, the discovery of an 18½ minute gap on that tape caused a national furor, second only to the public's reaction to the [Saturday Night massacre](#). Public disclosure of a two-toned buzz or hum that caused the gap in conversation supercharged calls for impeachment and finally unraveled the landslide electoral victory Nixon had achieved just two years earlier. It left the political landscape

scarred, even four decades later, and plagued by culture wars that persist to this day. Nixon's term could not have ended in a more devastating way for the office of the presidency or the nation.

Yet more than 40 years later, the infamous gap remains one of Watergate's most enduring and tantalizing mysteries. Technological efforts to recover what was erased (or obscured by the humming noise) have all failed, although on fleeting portions of the tapes faint, almost ghostly, human voices can be detected. In 2009, it was thought that a [forensic examination of Haldeman's handwritten notes](#) might reveal the substance of the conversation. That experiment by the National Archives failed too.

Recently released testimony from Nixon himself just might hold the key to unscrambling what happened forty years ago. And it turns out that answering two of the three main questions about the gap—who caused it and why—not only solves most of a historical mystery, but is also critical to understanding Nixon's downfall.

Dissembling and Deception

An axiom among lawyers is that people who are lying radiate strong clues, if one is trained to spot them. When someone can't tell the truth, because the truth is not their ally, they often attack the questioner (think Anthony Weiner or Lance Armstrong). Another tactic is to make what experts call convincing statements (or perhaps more accurately, attempts-to-convince statements) like "I would never do that" or "You think I would jeopardize my job by doing that?" Rather than respond to a simple question with a direct answer, they dissemble and attempt to manipulate the listener, usually with a string of protestations about their goodness, honesty, integrity, or importance.

And then there is the very powerful "truth in a lie." Philip Houston, a former CIA employee whose job it was to catch double agents, and recent co-author of the best-seller *Spy the Lie*, uses a quote from Vice President [Spiro T. Agnew](#) to explain the concept.

"I apologize for lying to you," Agnew once said, "and I promise I won't deceive you *except in matters of this sort* [emphasis added]."

As Houston explains it, a liar, without even realizing it, will often "say things that reveal what in reality he knows to be the truth." Houston calls this phenomenon "unintended messages" or simply "truth in a lie." In the Agnew example, the disgraced vice president was saying that he would indeed continue to lie "in matters of this sort." It was a revealing message buried in an otherwise truthful apology.^[2]

In a similar vein, when Richard Nixon testified for eleven hours before a grand jury in June 1975, he left behind some compelling clues as to what he really knew about the 18½ minute gap.

A third grand jury impaneled in Washington, DC was still investigating Watergate, ten months after Nixon's resignation and Gerald Ford's controversial, politically-suicidal pardon. Nixon's testimony was supposed to remain forever sealed under established rules of grand jury secrecy. But in 2011, a federal court opened the [transcript](#) of the former president's appearance under the "important history" exception to the law.

Most observers, after a cursory reading, found [nothing novel](#) in the testimony. Same old combative Nixon, no new revelations. But Houston says historians weren't looking closely enough at *what* the former president said and *how* he said it. "I have never seen anything quite like it," Houston said, after reading the transcript. "I could teach an entire class on detecting deception using this testimony."

No president or ex-president had ever testified under oath before a grand jury until Nixon took the stand; naturally, his appearance was highly choreographed. Two grand jurors, whose identities remain secret, were flown from Washington, DC to California. They sat in a room with Nixon for two days while he was questioned for more than 11 hours by lawyers from the Watergate Special Prosecution Force (WSPF).

Because of his "full and free" pardon for past crimes, Nixon's only jeopardy in the proceeding was committing perjury. As Nixon once observed to his White House counsel, John Dean, "Perjury is a tough rap to prove." Yet the former president was still taking a risk by testifying. Nixon, after all, had made his name on the national stage by helping to catch a former State Department official (and Soviet agent) [Alger Hiss](#) in a perjury trap, through tenacious and relentless questioning.

The ex-president's discomfort in [answering questions about the gap](#) was evident from the start. Houston points out that Nixon exhibited anxiety by launching into the highly revelatory "attack mode" before the first question about the gap was even posed. He interrupted to speak directly to the two grand jurors present. Nixon wanted to make clear that he regarded the whole exercise as a witch hunt orchestrated by US District Court Chief Judge [John J. Sirica](#), who had presided over the Watergate criminal trials and the fight for the tapes.

"If I could ask one question here," Nixon interjected, just as the topic became the 18½ minute gap. "This is just for information only . . . this matter of the eighteen and a half minute gap . . . *I know Judge Sirica considered [this] to be his dish of tea and he had it all wiped around in open court* [emphasis added]. Is that a matter that the grand jury is already familiar with?"

This interjection was the start of what Houston found to be a "high volume" of deceptive indicators when the subject of Nixon's testimony became the tape gap. One aspect stood out in particular though—Nixon was especially touchy about his October 1 car ride with Al Haig, which had been noted in the presidential daily log as "3:06 to 4:55 PM: The president and Mr. Haig motored through the Washington metropolitan area."

A trial lawyer by training, Nixon went into high gear over the car ride, again preempting the prosecutor, [Richard Davis](#), before he even had a chance to raise it. The former president began sprinkling unintended messages, or “truth in a lie,” all over the record. Knowing the October 1 entry from his daily log had been highlighted, Nixon wanted to control this terrain first—he would ask his own questions and give his own answers.

“Before answering that question,” he interrupted WSPF prosecutor Davis, “for the benefit of the grand jury, since they will be seeing this [October 1] log—I mean if I were in your position, and I am sure you have thought of this, what in the world was I spending that much time with Haig for?”

Davis did not even have time to agree with the Nixon, who just kept going. “I spent twenty minutes with him, and then I apparently—we spent over an hour and a half in the car. I mean, the presumption, if I were questioning, frankly—I am not trying to help you do a job on anybody, but my point is you want the truth, and we were having very, very long discussions, and this may explain one of the reasons Haig didn’t get there any sooner than he did, but that is when we had the Agnew crisis, and I remember that long drive in the country. That is when we decided that Mr. Agnew had to go, then. He didn’t go then, but he went later.”

As Nixon kept filibustering, prosecutor Davis did not dare interject. “I know what that conversation [in the car] was about,” Nixon rambled on, “but I just wanted you to know it wasn’t about this thing [the 18½ minute gap]. Neither Haig nor I thought it was a problem at all, based on the fact that it was not subpoenaed. And we thought, too, it was just a technical matter, and we were thankful it hadn’t happened on something that had been subpoenaed.”

Houston says by his evasions, Nixon was actually conveying the fact that the car ride *did* have something to do with the gap. And the former president was leaving another big fat clue: the gap had something to do with a technical defect in the wording of the subpoena for the tape.

Battle Over the Tapes

Nixon was undoubtedly telling a partial truth when he asserted that Agnew was a topic of discussion during the car ride. The crisis over the vice president was in full bloom. Agnew had been accused of taking bribes from persons seeking to do business in Maryland, beginning when he was a county executive and even as vice president; in nine days he would resign from office rather than contest a criminal indictment (and bill of impeachment that would have surely followed).

But the topic of Watergate—specifically, the battle over the White House tapes—was also front and center for the president and his chief of staff on October 1.

Nixon was already plotting to fire special prosecutor [Archibald Cox](#) unless he strictly limited his request for White House tapes. The president's plan: his staff (read Rose Mary Woods) would prepare transcripts of nine tapes already subpoenaed by Cox; then a trusted third party, most likely Senator John C. Stennis (D-Mississippi), would listen to the tapes and verify the accuracy of the transcripts. No one would gain independent access to the recordings. Executive privilege would prevail, and the allegation that the president was involved in the Watergate break-in or cover-up would be put to rest once and for all by these few transcripts.

The reason for the sudden car ride stems from the irreconcilable difference between the four to five minute gap Woods believed she caused and immediately reported, and the 18½ gap that was eventually disclosed. Woods never backed down from her assertion that she was only responsible for four to five minutes of the gap—a fact that never made sense in the scheme of things. If, as many believed, Nixon's devoted secretary had caused the erasure and was taking the fall for her long-time boss, why not just admit to the entire 18½ minutes?^[3]

That Woods was always telling the truth as she knew it was corroborated by later reports from acoustic experts. They found that between October 1, when she first reported a gap, and November 13, when the total length of the missing conversation became public, someone with elite access in the White House had taken the tape and used Woods's machine, a Uher 5000, to make five to nine passes over the tape, thereby tripling or quadrupling Woods's "accidental" erasure from four to five minutes to 18½ minutes.^[4]

One must take a moment here to understand precisely how the Uher 5000 worked. This facet received insufficient attention 40 years ago, primarily because the case was eventually dropped—no one was ever indicted for the erasure. Prosecutors thought the nation had had enough of Watergate, and the issue faded away in the press too.

Doug Blackwell was a service technician who worked for the American company that imported [Uher tape recorders](#) from Munich, Germany back in 1973. He knew the intricacies of the \$500 machine (\$2,600 in 2014 dollars) and also that what Rose Mary Woods described as her "accident" could not possibly have happened. He once demonstrated as much to two WSPF attorneys who visited his office, but was never called to testify and faded into obscurity rather than achieve what surely would have been his 15 minutes of fame.

According to Blackwell, who was contacted by the author and is telling his story here for the first time, the Uher 5000 had fail-safe measures built in to prevent exactly the type of accident that Woods described. Put simply, the machine could not be placed into record mode (and erase what was on a tape) when that tape was already being played. If a tape was playing the record button could not be depressed or activated.

The machine was designed to force a user to employ two hands to start a recording (or record over a previously recorded tape). One finger was needed to depress the start button

at the same instant another finger was used to depress the record button. Or as Blackwell put it, you had to engage the right and left side of your brain simultaneously, since the keys were spaced far enough apart it was not easy to pull off this double depression of keys with one hand. This feature was one of many reasons why Uher 5000 was preferred by professionals in the recording field, where they could not afford to make elementary mistakes. As the instruction book noted, “[F]aulty handling is almost impossible due to the unique design of the recorder.”^[5]

All of the foregoing was true even if a transcriber used a foot pedal, as Woods had done. If the tape was playing because the foot pedal was being held down, the record button would not depress.

Thus, the famous—or infamous—photo of Woods’s awkward contortion, demonstrating how she thought she had accidentally caused the erasure, was indicative of nothing. She said she stopped transcribing to take a phone call, and while keeping pressure on the foot pedal, reached to hit the stop button but accidentally hit the record button. Blackwell explained that if she hit the record button while keeping pressure on the pedal, the record button would not have depressed. If she released her pressure on the pedal, the record button could have been depressed, but the machine would have done nothing in response. The Uher 5000 was foolproof in this respect.

Woods, according to Blackwell, did not cause a single erasure. The four to five minute gap was already present on the tape when she played it. Someone altered that portion before the tape ever came into her possession.

The Problem with Cox’s Subpoena

The tapes were of paramount importance, of course, because they promised to settle who was telling the truth: the 37th president of the United States, or his 34-year-old former counsel, a preppy-looking lawyer who had mesmerized a television audience estimated at 80 million back in June 1973. John Dean had alleged that the president knew about and participated in a criminal obstruction of justice, the effort to cover-up his campaign’s involvement in the Watergate burglary. But Dean had not been able to offer much in the way of independent and corroborating proof. It was his word (specifically, his copious recollections) against Richard Nixon’s. No resolution seemed in sight until White House aide Alexander Butterfield dropped a bombshell while testifying before the Senate Watergate Committee on July 16, 1973. Butterfield confirmed there was a voice-activated taping system in the White House, almost instantly touching off a historic legal fight.

Two days after Butterfield’s testimony, Archibald Cox, the Harvard law professor-turned-special prosecutor, sent a hastily drafted letter to the White House requesting eight tapes; a subpoena a week later expanded the request to nine. Six tapes corresponded with Dean’s meetings with the president and three were recorded shortly after the break-in.

In one instance, though, there was a problem with the exact wording of Cox's subpoena. He incorrectly asked for the recording of the "meeting of June 20, 1972, in the president's Executive Office Building office between the president and Messrs. Ehrlichman and Haldeman from 10:30 AM to 1:00 PM (time approximate)."

There was no joint meeting of these three men in point of fact. Ehrlichman had met alone with the president for about an hour that morning, and afterwards Haldeman conferred with Nixon separately. No tape with all three men in attendance existed. Obviously, the special prosecutor intended to obtain the recording of both meetings (and eventually the White House bowed to this interpretation). But Cox's initial lack of precision was what Nixon was referring to when he testified before the grand jury that the Haldeman recording with the 18½ minute gap technically had not been subpoenaed.

The president may have been the first to realize this discrepancy because, in all likelihood, he had already listened to the tape. Six months earlier, in anticipation of Dean's appearance before the Senate, Nixon had spent the entire day of June 4, 1973 having one Dean tape after another brought to him so that he could make notes of the conversations. There is actually a day-long tape of Nixon *listening* to tapes.

Thus, it is highly likely Nixon insisted on being the first to listen to the three tapes from June 1972 that Cox requested. That they had been included in the subpoena at all came as something of a surprise. Unlike the other tapes, they did not involve John Dean, nor was that first week after the break-in a focus of Dean's testimony. But if the president discussed Watergate with either Haldeman or Ehrlichman on June 20 that would be of paramount interest to Cox. Nixon surely wanted to listen to these recordings before anyone else, as he had done with the Dean tapes from the spring of 1973, to learn if anything damaging had been said.

The person who had absolute control of the tapes at this time was none other than Alexander Haig. After Butterfield's testimony, Haig had ordered the dismantling of the taping system and removed hundreds of tapes from the custody of the Secret Service. He anointed one of his aides, deputy presidential assistant John Bennett, to be the official guardian of the tapes, but for reasons that have never been explained, Bennett immediately turned the keys and the safe combination over to Haig for ten days—a period that coincides with the weekend after Cox's subpoena, which the president spent at Camp David, along with Haig, Rose Mary Woods, and Haig aide John Brennan.

If Nixon, and probably Haig too, listened to the tape of June 20, 1972 this early, they would have noted a happy fact and a dangerous fact. The Ehrlichman meeting contained not even a whisper of Watergate. During the Haldeman portion of the tape, however, there was an approximately 20-minute discussion about the break-in. This is known from both Haldeman's notes of the meeting, which eventually surfaced, and from the entry in his diary—but not from the tape itself because 18½ minutes of it were erased by someone.^[6]

There was an urgent and compelling reason, of course, to redact the conversation Nixon had had with Haldeman on June 20.

After Dean's defection in April 1973, Nixon constructed what became known as his "firewall defense." He maintained that he first learned of the cover-up on March 21, 1973, when Dean famously warned him there was a "cancer growing on the presidency." Prior to that time, Nixon insisted, he knew nothing about any alleged cover-up.

The discussion with Haldeman threatened to collapse the firewall defense. It proved the president learned who was primarily responsible for the break-in soon after it happened and that these men worked for the Nixon campaign, specifically, the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

The notion that the president, or the president and Haig acting in concert, were responsible for the initial four to five minute erasure fits with Haig's peculiar behavior during a critical juncture: while Rose Mary Woods was preparing transcripts for special prosecutor Cox, for what the White House hoped would be an acceptable compromise.

Woods and [Stephen B. Bull](#), a White House special assistant, arose early in Washington on the morning of September 28, 1973, to make the hour or so drive to Camp David. Once there, they set up shop in the Dogwood Cabin. Bull was supposed to locate the subpoenaed conversations and cue up the tapes for Woods, and she would do the transcribing.

Bull started with the June 20 tape. He tried to match up the Cox's description of the Nixon/Ehrlichman/Haldeman meeting with the tape but naturally couldn't locate the point where all three men met together. So he called Haig.

Haig was with the president, so Bull left a message. Haig left the Oval Office at 9:50 AM and returned Bull's call by 10:10 AM. Haig talked to Woods, who answered the phone, and she typed his exact response: "Cox was a little bit confused in his request re the meeting on June 20th. It says Ehrlichman/Haldeman meeting—what he wants is a segment on June 20 from 10:25 to 11:20 with John Ehrlichman alone. Al Haig."

This limitation was not truly responsive to Cox's subpoena. Why pick the Ehrlichman portion alone? Why not the Haldeman portion, when Watergate was actually discussed? As later testimony confirmed, no one from the White House called Cox to clarify the matter. But Haig's intent seems clear: he wanted to steer Rose Mary Woods away from the Haldeman portion of the tape.

Haig later said he talked to the lawyer who replaced Dean as White House counsel, J. Fred Buzhardt, Jr., for guidance. Whether they conferred or not, there is no logical explanation for why Haig decided that Cox meant only to subpoena the Ehrlichman portion of the tape—that is, no logical explanation unless Haig already knew that the Ehrlichman portion was clean and the Haldeman portion contained a damning discussion of Watergate.

Rose Mary Woods spent the entire weekend at Camp David trying to transcribe the Ehrlichman part of the tape. The recordings made in Nixon's hideaway office in the Executive Office Building are particularly difficult to render—the mikes were not well situated and a clock on Nixon's desk is a serious impediment to hearing the voices, with its incessant “tick, tick, tick” masking every conversation.

On Saturday afternoon, Nixon showed up for about six minutes to check on the progress of the transcription. According to Woods, he put on headphones and fiddled with the recording machine, agreed that the audio quality was terrible and commiserated with her on the thankless job she had been asked to do.

Back in the White House on Monday morning, October 1, Woods requested a recording machine more suitable for transcribing. The Sony she had been using did not have a foot pedal and its headphones were too big and kept falling off her head. The Uher 5000 arrived around noon. She completed the Ehrlichman portion of the tape and then listened ahead to make sure he had left the room.

At this point Woods received a telephone call. After four to five minutes, she hung up and to her chagrin noticed the record button was depressed (the machine had a lid, so she would not have been able to easily notice if the tape reels were actually turning). Woods rewound the tape and listened—and heard a buzzing sound where there should have been voices. She stopped what she was doing and went to see the president immediately, to tell him what had happened.

There is little doubt that the humming noise on the tape had been created by Nixon with Haig's assistance if not instigation. During the ten-day window that Haig had the keys to the tapes, they were not under the control of John Bennett, who later kept a log of anyone who accessed the tapes. From the time that Haig returned the keys and combination until Stephen Bull and Rose Mary Woods checked out the June 20 tape to take it to Camp David on September 28, no one else touched the tape.

The only time someone could have tampered with the tape was when Nixon went up to Camp David, just after Butterfield testified and Archibald Cox sent his initial letter requesting access to specific tapes. The president probably could not resist the temptation to listen to the June 1972 tapes, as he had done with the Dean tapes earlier; indeed, he might have regarded it as his duty. And he would not have liked what he heard on the Haldeman portion of the June 20 tape.

This sequence of events was the reason the two men were so grateful in the car ride. They had been handed an unexpected gift from Rose Mary Woods. She believed she had caused an erasure on the Haldeman tape, and they now had someone plausible to blame for the supposed gaffe if their compromise plan with Cox failed and the recording remained an issue—even if it were to become public.

Still, someone utilized the Uher 5000 after October 1 to make at least five and as many as nine additional passes, deliberately lengthening the erasure to 18½ minutes. Whatever

Nixon/Haig had started erasing needed to be double-checked to make sure the entire Watergate segment with Haldeman—the president’s first recorded reaction to the break-in—had been obliterated. A review of Haig’s testimony and comments at the time suggests his direct involvement, keeping in mind Houston’s indicators of deception.[\[7\]](#)

When asked in December 1973 how the 18½ minute gap could possibly have happened, Haig nonchalantly testified before Judge Sirica that “perhaps there had been one tone applied by Miss Woods . . . and then perhaps some sinister force had come in and applied the other energy source and taken care of the information on that tape.” Then, after testifying, Haig dismissively told a gaggle of reporters gathered outside the courtroom that he thought Woods was responsible for the entire erasure after all. “I’ve known women who think they’ve talked for five minutes and then have talked for an hour,” he said, sweeping away her assertion that she was responsible for only a four to five minute gap. The reporters wondered if Haig had ever asked the president if he might have altered the tape. Haig, “looking somewhat pained, shook his head negatively.” By so doing, Haig neatly sidestepped the question, while also leaving it unclear which part of the compound query he was not answering.[\[8\]](#)

Though doggedly loyal to Richard Nixon, Rose Mary Woods steadfastly refused the scapegoat’s role. Yet the [popular presumption](#) became that she, indeed, did the dirty work for the president out of blind devotion.[\[9\]](#)

Nixon’s own words on the subject, while under oath, point to a different conclusion. His grand jury testimony contained truth in a lie. The former president’s hyper-sensitivity about the October 1 car ride . . . his pre-emption of questions about it . . . his statement that he and Haig were thankful that Woods’s erasure was accidental, and not on a recording that had been subpoenaed . . . all these giveaways (along with Haig’s) strongly suggest that he and Haig were the conniving parties responsible for the gap, after they recognized the golden opportunity handed them by a trusting Rose Mary Woods.

They took a huge, desperate gamble, and a misguided one. As John Dean has pointed out, many Watergate-related conversations after June 1972 and before March 1973 (when Dean made his cancer on the presidency remark) were just as damaging to the “firewall” defense concocted when Watergate began to threaten the president.

Their all-too-obvious attempt to preserve the firewall lit a firestorm.

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[1] Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 918-919.

[2] Philip Houston, Michael Floyd, Susan Carnicero with Don Tennant, *Spy the Lie: Former CIA Officers Teach You How to Detect Deception* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2012), 103.

[3] Ronald J. Ostrow and Robert L. Jackson, "[Caused Only Part of Gap—Miss Woods](#)," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 November 1973; George Lardner, Jr., "[Prosecutor: 'No Reason for Silences'](#)," *Washington Post*, 29 November 1973.

[4] George Lardner, Jr., "[Experts Report on Tape Gap](#)," *Washington Post*, 5 June 1974.

[5] Interview with Doug Blackwell, 21 August 2013; John Saar, "[Expert Shows Possible Tape Erasure](#)," *Washington Post*, 28 November 1973. The title of this article suggests that an expert demonstrated in November 1973 how the erasure might have occurred, but in fact he was unable to duplicate the buzz on the tape in the manner described by Rose Mary Woods. The closest approximation was apparently achieved by White House counsel Buzhardt working together with a National Security Agency technician. By pressing the Uher's "Start" and "Record" buttons simultaneously, and keeping a Tensor desk lamp nearby turned on, they were able to replicate the two-toned hum. George Lardner, Jr., "[Buzhardt on 'Gap'](#)," *Washington Post*, 30 November 1973.

[6] H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1994), 473.

[7] In early 1974, when WSPF prosecutors were still trying to get to the bottom of the 18½ minute mystery, they came to believe the long weekend of October 4-7, 1973—when the tapes were in Key Biscayne, Florida, along with the president, Haig, Bull, and Woods—was likely when the deliberate, extended erasure occurred. George Lardner, Jr., "[Prosecutors Eye October Weekend in Erasure Probe](#)," *Washington Post*, 20 January 1974.

[8] George Lardner, Jr., "[Haig Tells of Theories on Erasure](#)," *Washington Post*, 7 December 1973.

[9] Walter Pincus, then executive editor of *The New Republic*, was a notable exception to the widespread belief that Rose Mary Woods was the chief culprit. Writing in *The Washington Post*, Pincus presented a theory that absolved her of personally redacting the

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tape, and pointed instead to the president and Stephen Bull. Pincus, however, put Woods squarely inside the subsequent cover-up. Her story was crafted to “confuse Judge Sirica, the prosecutors and the public, and perhaps take the spotlight away from whomever did the actual erasing.” Walter Pincus, “[A Tape Erasure Theory](#),” *Washington Post*, 26 January 1974.

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